DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 461 797 CG 031 545

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TITLE Extending Program Resources: Meeting Necessity with Invention.
PUB DATE 2002-02-00
NOTE 9p.; In: "Implementing Comprehensive School Guidance Programs: Critical Leadership Issues and Successful Responses"; see CG 031 528.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comprehensive Guidance; *Cooperation; Efficiency; Elementary Secondary Education; Guidance; Guidance Objectives; Mentors; *Organizational Effectiveness; *Partnerships in Education; School Community Relationship; *School Counseling; School Districts; School Guidance; Social Workers
IDENTIFIERS AmeriCorps; Boy Scouts of America

ABSTRACT

This document describes collaborative strategies used by one school guidance department that allow counselors to complete their designated work without extending their school day. One strategy involves pairing mentors with first-year counselors to help answer their questions. Another uses retired counselors as "substitutes" when regular counselors are out for an extended period. Computers are used to administer aptitude surveys and provide college and scholarship information. Working with teachers ensures that career information is provided for each curriculum. Collaboration is also encouraged with community groups such as Boy Scouts and AmeriCorps. Working with the Division of Family Services provided a means for hiring school social workers. Before- and after-school programs and cross-training have enhanced the guidance and counseling program. By knowing and partnering with community resources counselors are better able to meet their daily challenges. (JDM)

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by

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Chapter Seventeen

Extending Program Resources: *Meeting Necessity with Invention*

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It has been said that necessity is the mother of invention. Nowhere does that ring more true than in the implementation of a comprehensive guidance program. Squeezing ten hours of work into a six-hour day is a feat that would make Houdini smile . . . and yet school counselors are faced with that challenge regularly. The scope of work is clear: deliver the guidance curriculum, facilitate individual planning, be responsive to the needs and concerns of students, and complete those tasks that maintain and enhance the total guidance program. Add a few non-guidance activities to the mix and either counselors find themselves playing the "what gets cut?" game or they find ways to work smarter. Many times "working smarter" translates into a combination of snappy scheduling and inventing new ways of "delivering the goods."

Although prudent schedules are important, counselors don't assemble widgets. They work with human beings, many of whom are going through the most confusing times of their lives. Adolescents' needs don't always fit into a counselor's well-developed schedule. Consequently, St. Joseph, Missouri, counselors find ways to stretch the school day through collaborative strategies that allow them to do their designated work *and* maintain their sanity. This monograph will describe a number of strategies that have proven helpful to our guidance department.

Utilizing Retired Counselors and Mentors

Before delving into specific components of comprehensive guidance, let's discuss some basics. When counselors are absent for an extended period, say a week or more, their program suffers. Classroom commitments fall behind, groups are left unseen, and students receiving

individual services lose momentum. To prevent such backsliding, we draw from our pool of retired counselors to act as substitutes. Because they are familiar with the program, and in some cases with the students, and because they have a consultation network already established, these folks can keep the momentum flowing. Similarly, all counselors new to the St. Joseph district are assigned a counseling mentor. The mentor is a veteran who knows community resources, the comprehensive guidance program, and the school district infrastructure. New counselors know they can contact their mentor with any question or concern. Materials, consultations about student issues, and the ins and outs of working with many personality types are but a few of the subjects mentors and new counselors cover. These two ideas help keep an up-and-running program moving forward and jump-start a novice's job performance.

Using Computers

Another "basic" involves the use of the computer. Good record-keeping software programs are time-savers. Seated at their desks, counselors can view students' demographic information, attendance, grades, and schedules. With a few keystrokes, high school counselors can see the number of students in a particular class, or a list of students failing one or several classes. Electronic mail has made information sharing easier and faster. Changes to the guidance curriculum appear quickly and are universally available through the counseling website. Meeting dates, staff-development offerings, and job openings are also posted on the website.

During the 2000–01 school year, middle school counselors began doing aptitude surveys via the computer. Working in a computer laboratory setting and using self-scoring software has saved considerable time. Good software helps link aptitude and career options quickly and pleasantly. This is another way the computer literate counselor is able to work smarter.

The computer offers many kinds of help to the high school counselor. Scholarship information and applications are now computerized. Reports are generated via the computer. If we want to know the number of young women applying for scholarships over the last five years, we can generate that information in a matter of moments. Learning the operation of a piece of software takes time, but once counselors become familiar with a program like SASI or Filemaker Pro, their lives are simplified.

Collaborating with Teachers

Career education is an important part of Missouri comprehensive

guidance. However, in the St. Joseph school district, classroom teachers deliver the lion's share of career education. Each curriculum has a career component that integrates career pathway information and the world of work with the subject matter being taught. This is a win-win situation for students, teachers, and counselors. Teachers integrate real-world application of knowledge while delivering daily doses of language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. Community members visit elementary classrooms to demonstrate how these subjects are used in their everyday work. Counselors in almost all district elementary schools arrange yearly career fairs, but they are not responsible for the total delivery of the career component of the guidance curriculum.

Drawing on Community Groups

In the middle school there is more counselor involvement in career education. Through the Boy Scouts of America and its Learning for Life program, counselors are able to request working men and women to speak in classrooms where related occupations have been presented and connected to the subject matter being taught. Although some counselor time is spent in organizing these encounters, it doesn't represent nearly the outlay of time that would be needed were the counselor to present all these sessions personally. The Learning for Life coordinator has organized a pool of presenters who make themselves available for classroom presentations. The best videotape in the world cannot possibly answer all the questions generated by seventh- and eighth-grade students. Having a real person who actually does the job under discussion can be invaluable . . . and it can save the counselor some time.

The enhancement of our high school career guidance program is an interesting story. Back in the early 1990s, we helped write a federal grant that brought 32 AmeriCorps workers to St. Joseph. Seven of the 32 worked in the school setting, and three of those seven were in high schools. Their mission was to better connect the business community to the high school; to inform students, particularly those who were not interested in attending a four-year college or university, about the world of work; and to spark in high school teachers the desire to align their subject matter to real-world work experience. Ten years later the three career technicians are still working away at this mission. Funding streams have changed from AmeriCorps dollars, to Welfare to Work dollars, to School District of St. Joseph dollars. Their work has proven so valuable that the district has been willing to pick up the technicians' salaries. Just as an aside, two of the original AmeriCorps workers have completed teaching degrees and are going on to their own careers in the educational setting.

The service the career technicians have rendered to students and the load they have taken from the high school counselors is huge. Counselors talk to students about their educational plans, discover students' career aspirations, and then share this information with the career technician. The technician works with the students to delve more deeply into particular career options; the training necessary for these careers; the postsecondary centers that offer such training; and details such as cost, proximity to home, etc. The student, career technician, parents, and school counselor then proceed to research and apply for scholarship opportunities. The technicians' role in delivering comprehensive guidance has been invaluable. In addition to the contributions already mentioned, they also arrange job-shadowing experiences, coordinate the Learning for Life visits in the high schools, and help organize career fairs. They have given high school counselors the gift of time by shouldering part of the career education load. We had a need. We invented a solution.

Sharing the Load with Other Mental Health Professionals

The story is similar in the area of responsive services in the high school. When comprehensive guidance was originally implemented in the St. Joseph district, high school counselors were in the greatest need of assistance. Although they desired to deliver the model, they were still expected to shoulder many of their more traditional duties. Invention to the rescue! By collaborating with our local Division of Family Services and the Caring Communities Initiative, we were able to hire three social workers. Two are licensed and the third is soon to be licensed. Licensure is important because part of the social workers' salary costs can be billed back to Medicaid if they are fully licensed. With partners paying two-thirds of the salary cost combined with Medicaid reimbursement, a school district like St. Joseph can afford to hire highly trained social workers to become a part of the guidance department.

What role do social workers play? Because the Division of Family Services is a funding partner, the three are highly involved in the prevention of abuse and neglect. Operationally this translates into working with pregnant and parenting youth, youth involved in abusive relationships with either parents or partners, and youth who for one reason or another have become disenfranchised from their families. Their work also reaches into the middle school. By working with younger siblings of pregnant or parenting high school students, the social workers hope to prevent additional early pregnancies.

The school district is interested in keeping these youngsters in school. Every day they attend, they create dollars for the district. And every day they attend they are less likely to add to the dropout rate. Caring Communities is

interested in both the abuse and the persistence to graduation issues. The school counselor is interested in meeting the needs of the students, and the social worker has the expertise and the time to do just that. Consider the load removed from the counselor. Many of these youngsters are in chronic crisis. They require school-based support if they are to complete high school. Social workers can provide that support or they know where to find the help needed, be it a shelter, food, medical assistance, legal counsel, or a myriad of other services. Through collaboration we have provided better services to students and gained minutes for the counselor to be involved in something other than crisis intervention.

One elementary school counselor, working in partnership with her administrator and the local Caring Communities Initiative, found a way to bring a mental health practitioner into the school setting several days a week. Working with no more than 10 families at a time, the mental health professional acts as a case manager. Through an assessment process that involves, among other things, an in-home study, the professional and the family identify strengths and needs. The case manager then acts to link the family to community resources. Some community services are delivered right at the school site. Again, by working with 10 of the school's most dysfunctional families, providing individual and group counseling for their children, linking them to services, and providing consultation to teachers, the mental health worker is saving the counselor hours of time and at the same time providing a comprehensive service to the family that the school counselor simply would not have the time or expertise to deliver.

Other community agencies offer opportunities for group counseling in the school setting. The St. Joseph YWCA, working with grant dollars, provides CHOICES groups that focus on raising self-esteem and a sense of empowerment. These groups run each semester at all of the middle schools. This is an example of another pair of hands helping the counselor to deliver a responsive service.

Similarly, the Buchanan County Juvenile Office promotes more positive relationships between mothers and daughters through the Mirror Image Groups. Here teens and their moms meet regularly to improve communication, develop empathy for one another and, in general, get to know one another on a deeper level. Supported by grant dollars, this endeavor concludes by taking mothers and daughters on a "field trip." Although spending a night in a hotel might not seem exciting to some, for these moms and daughters, it can be quite an adventure. The school counselor's role in all this is to coordinate the time, date, and place for the school-based meetings and to make referrals. Again, this is a way the counselors' time can be stretched by partnering with another community agency.

Collaborating with Other Programs

Before- and after-school programs at the elementary and middle schools provide great resources for enhancing a guidance program. Serving to build linkages, the counselor

can tap into tutoring, recreational, and fine arts resources. These on-site programs provide hours of contact between students and good role models. Again, the counselor couldn't possibly provide the minutes of service being described here. Two of these middle school programs are underwritten by grants created collaboratively with the Juvenile Office and the City of St. Joseph. Elementary programs are paid for through Department of Elementary and Secondary Education dollars and money provided through the Caring Communities Initiative.

Another enhancement to the professional school counselor's work is participating in community cross-training. First, the opportunity to see and hear excellent speakers is really quite remarkable. This year alone, St. Joseph counselors have heard nationally known presenters on the issues of grief in the school setting, teenage drug and alcohol use and its effects on adolescent brain development, and Corrective Thinking. These speakers were brought to the community by agencies other than the school district. Costs were minimized while opportunities to mingle with people from other community agencies were maximized. When school people, juvenile officers, Division of Family Services workers, mental health professionals, and others start putting similar strategies in place, everyone's work becomes a little more effective. Collaborative training is cost effective and powerful in many ways.

Conclusion

In summary, it seems that collaboration, grant writing, and a willingness to do what it takes to get what we need are at the center of St. Joseph's guidance program. The superintendent of schools promotes a "schools without walls" philosophy. He not only encourages collaboration, he demands it! That mindset opens doors for all types of partnerships—and for all types of grant writing opportunities. The Juvenile Office might be able to apply for something a school district couldn't and visa versa. Underpinning all this activity, however, is knowledge of and respect for community agencies, their missions, and the human beings who work there. The task of the 21st-century guidance counselor *cannot* be accomplished in a vacuum. The job is too overwhelming. A caseload of 500 to 1 is too daunting. In St. Joseph we feel that the professional school counselor needs all the help he or she can muster. As administrators

we need to recognize our role in helping counselors link to resources that can help them "deliver the goods."

Necessity may be the mother of invention, but we don't believe in being needy for too long. Help *is* available! By knowing and partnering with community resources, counselors can better meet the challenges 21st-century schools face.

About the Authors

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